

THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

RECORDS OF EARLY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE
AS SOURCE MATERIAL

EDITED BY RUSSELL F. WHITEHEAD, A·I·A

VOLUME XXI

MONOGRAPH THREE

Dwellings in Northeastern Rhode Island and the Smithfields

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Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell

Smithfield (and North Smithfield) are traversed by three principal north and south thoroughfares, the Louisquisset, Douglas and Farnum "Pikes," of which the first named also passes through a part of Lincoln township. These old roadways have been enlarged and graded in recent years, but today the traveler, rolling easily along their well metalled surfaces, gains little idea of the heavier grades and slower routes, of which they were important existing elements at a far earlier time.

He will also get little idea of the real life of the localities through—but principally by—which he is passing; as most of the small villages lie off these main traveled routes, along with almost all the old farmhouses still left in this region. He will still be able to glimpse a few remnants of the old system of Taverns that once flourished; but the old centers of industry, mills and houses, are mostly to be found on those steeper dirt roads that constantly cross and wind about the country, generally in an easterly or westerly direction, between these old "Pikes."

But that the old use of these north and south highways must have been considerable is evident from the great number of old Inns and Taverns that are still to be seen at many locations along their traveled margins; a large number despite the high mortality that seems to have attacked these old wayside houses of entertainment and hospitality—a mortality of which proof often remains in the very tangible form of high mounds of crumbling brickwork for the older, and the rugged and twisting outlines of still standing chimneys

for those more recently vanished. While lacking these direct proofs, another verdant witness may frequently be found, in the two clumps of old cedars—often of quite huge dimensions and height—that seem to have been the favorite and customary sentinels of the entrance gateways or doorstone boundaries of this region in early times; just as the spreading elms of Massachusetts and, farther north, the close groupings of overgrown lilacs may still be seen guarding the deserted home sites.

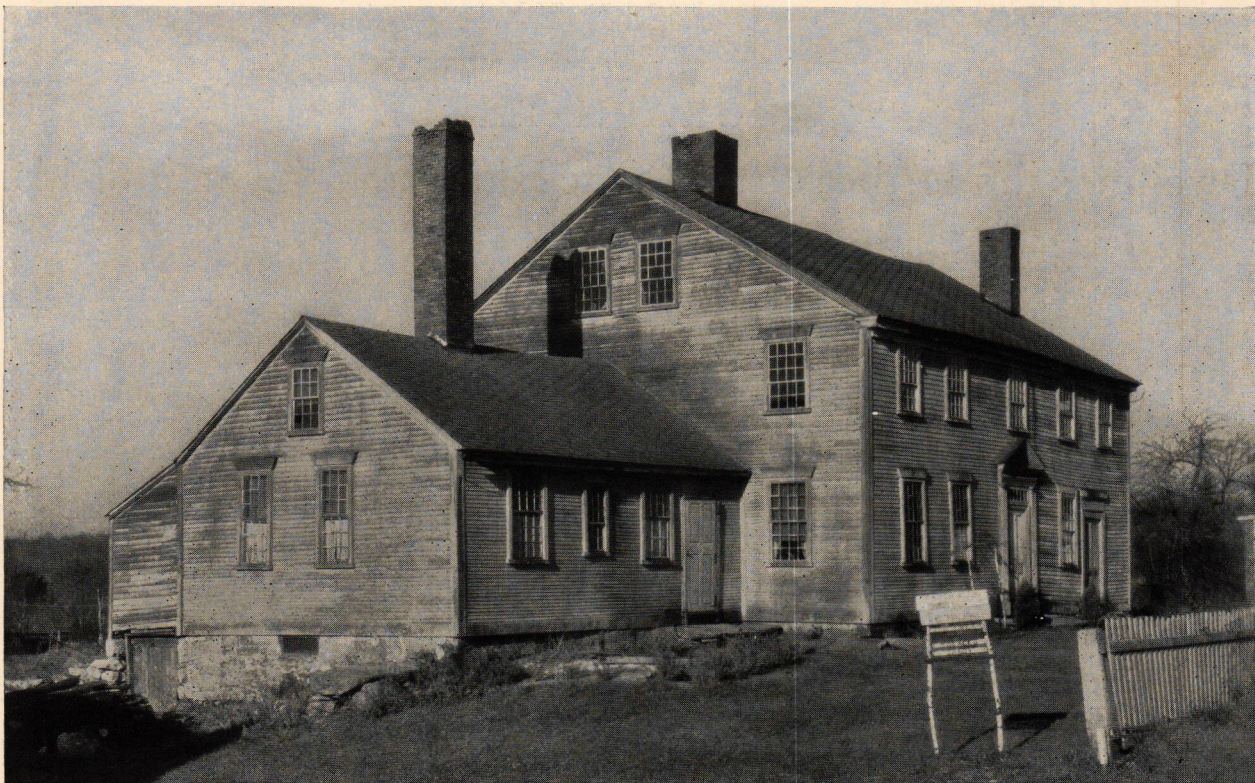
Smithfield itself still contains no less than three "Half Way" Houses in the district about ten miles above Providence, all once centers of activity and much frequented by the teaming confraternity during the period of a hundred to a hundred and fifty years or more ago. One of these, at a now quiet crossroads on the Farnum Pike, is shown on page 34, while a detail view of its principal entrance appeared on page 32 of Monograph Two. Originally a smaller house, stopping just at the right of the main doorway, it was enlarged by adding the addition beyond this point, with a separate outside door to the barroom, and a larger room for dances and gatherings upon the floor above. Most of these interiors have lost whatever old finish they may have possessed; although it is seldom indeed that much pains was lavished upon the woodwork of the early Inns of this district. Most attention was apparently paid to providing solid substantial construction, and ample fireplace and cooking facilities; along with the very important essential of commodious "stabling"; most of which latter construction has van-

ished altogether, except what has been found adaptable to be continued in use for the purposes of the simple farming.

As in other communities, these rolling acres were once possessed by large families; who spread from the original manors slowly over the sightly locations on the adjoining hillsides, as children grew up and married, and the parents provided them with domiciles nearby. This has been the common history of all New England communities; and it seems to have been particularly the case in this section of Rhode Island. But now

quite within the proverbial "stone's throw" of each other, the older ("Number One") has become a neglected tenement. Its eight-paneled doorway is surrounded by the more elaborated form of one of the most typical local doorway treatments.

To "Angell House Number Two" has befallen a better fate! Here an appreciative city family has moved in; and have gradually been uncovering and delighting in the quaint local treatments they have found in the architectural details of their new country home. While the woodwork around their doorway is of a



THE "HALF WAY" HOUSE ON FARNUM PIKE, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

these old families have all gone; and their once beautifully furnished homes have either been taken over by a few city dwellers who have come out to this region to enjoy the healthful air and beautiful views, or they have fallen upon more evil days and passed into the possession of less appreciative residents, and degenerated to "country tenements" (than which no city variant can be more forlorn—or more teeming with a youthful population!—than these).

Contrasting examples of both these fates appear in the next two houses; known here only as "Angell House Number One" and "Angell House Number Two"! Originally, both were probably of nearly equal interest and both still convey the charm so expressive of their origin and period. As they now stand,

simpler type of design, the proportions of the whole are more ample and hospitable compared to the narrow, higher composition of the neighbor house entrance design. The principal glory of this entrance is found in the beautiful metalwork of the round top-light, the details of which may be more clearly seen in the photographic detail shown on page 42, where it may be studied and contrasted with the similar top-light of the Steere House entrance, shown both there and in the detail drawing on page 43. The woodwork of the later doorway, taken in conjunction with the other two houses, shows the gradual evolution and simplification of the type, as it was worked upon by the carpenters local to the district. The earlier—"Angell Number One"—is of course the most



Doorway

THE ANGELL HOUSE NUMBER ONE, ABOUT 1780, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

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"stilted" in design; at the same time that it displays the most elaborate wood craftsmanship, but with a very simple wood toplight. The entablature is complete, and the pilaster has a separate and unusual decorated capital.

The "Number Two" House doorway shows the elimination of the conventional pilaster cap—and the architrave of the entablature continued of intention to perform both offices in the design. The grooved cutting around the door opening shows its close affinity with and relationship to the earlier doorway, where

justice. The ornaments employed are also rather frequently encountered in similar locations and use, in other houses not very far removed. It hardly seems possible that they could have been the product of any local artisan, no matter how skilled. Could it have been that it was at some time the custom to order these decorative adjuncts made from some city shop, in Providence or elsewhere, either to order, or from some "stock" catalogue, and have them made to dimension—to fit the wooden sash—which might perhaps even have been forwarded to the craftsman for



THE ANGELL HOUSE NUMBER ONE, ABOUT 1780, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

another type of carved grooved treatment, in the same position, is to be seen. And here the more elaborate leaded toplight design appears, introduced either originally into the doorway design, or possibly substituted for a simpler wooden pattern shortly after the house was built. In the Steere House doorway another experiment has been tried by the builder. He has now eliminated the entablature architrave and used instead the simplest of doric molded capital, to serve again two uses!

The great refinement and delicacy of the cast ornaments in these two arched glass lights can probably be realized, even if the drawing hardly does them

glazing? If so, it would explain a somewhat widespread use of similar arched lights, employing identical cast ornaments, differently assembled and combined, to be sure, but unquestionably cast from the same molds, and in a material susceptible of far more delicacy of modeling and perfection of detail than we are accustomed to find in the heavier cast leaden ornaments of the later "Colonial" doorlights of eastern Massachusetts, for instance!

The strips themselves are also not lead, but appear to be brass, weathered almost to a dark copper or gun metal tone, and of a very thin, narrow section with a raised bead on the top. See the drawing on page 43.

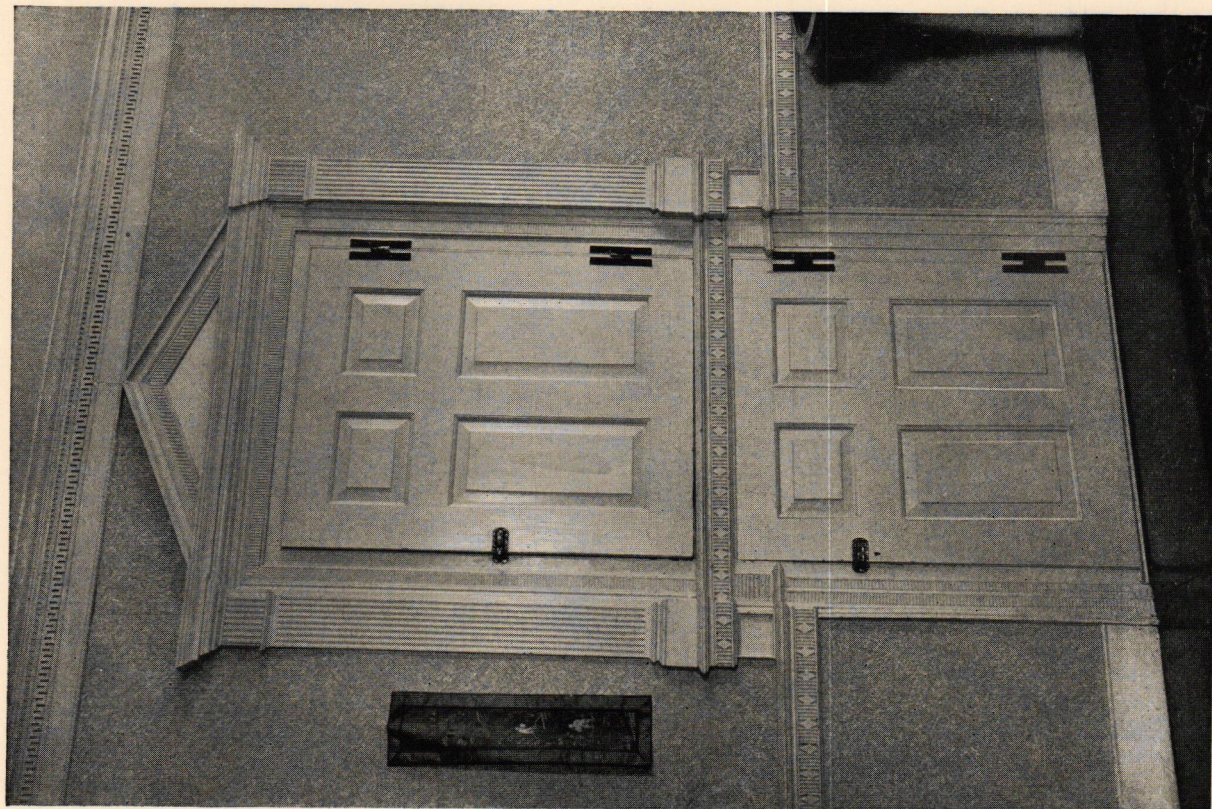
[36]



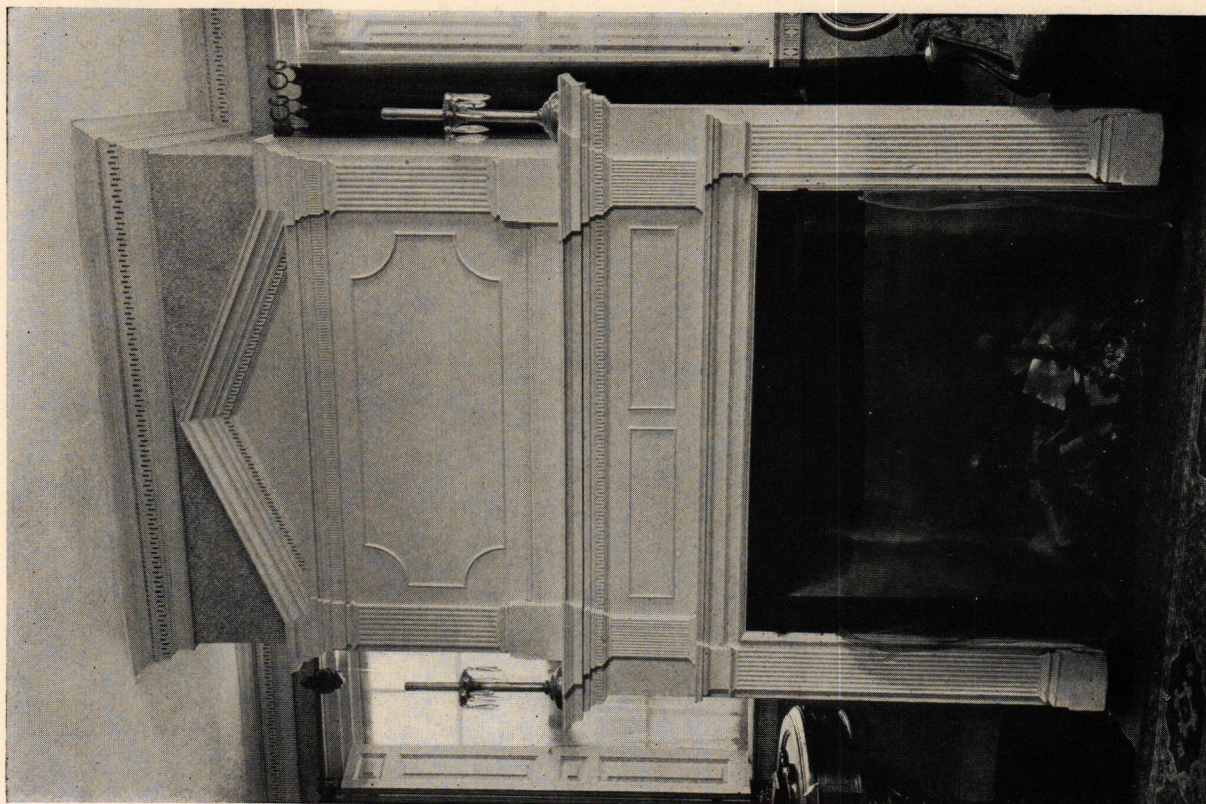
Doorway

THE ANGELL HOUSE NUMBER TWO, ABOUT 1810, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

[37]

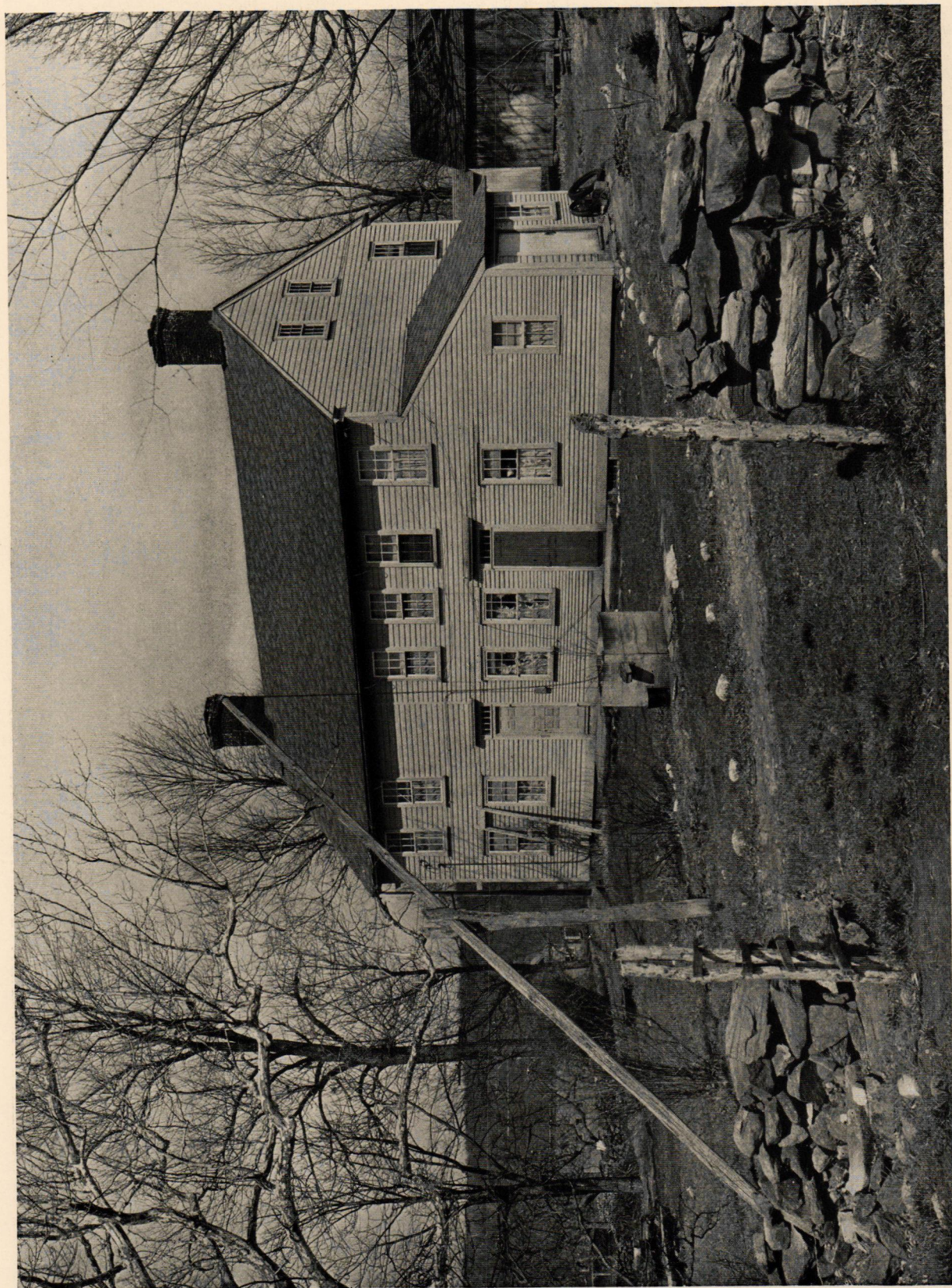


Wall Cupboard



Mantel

THE ANGELL HOUSE NUMBER TWO—1810—SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND



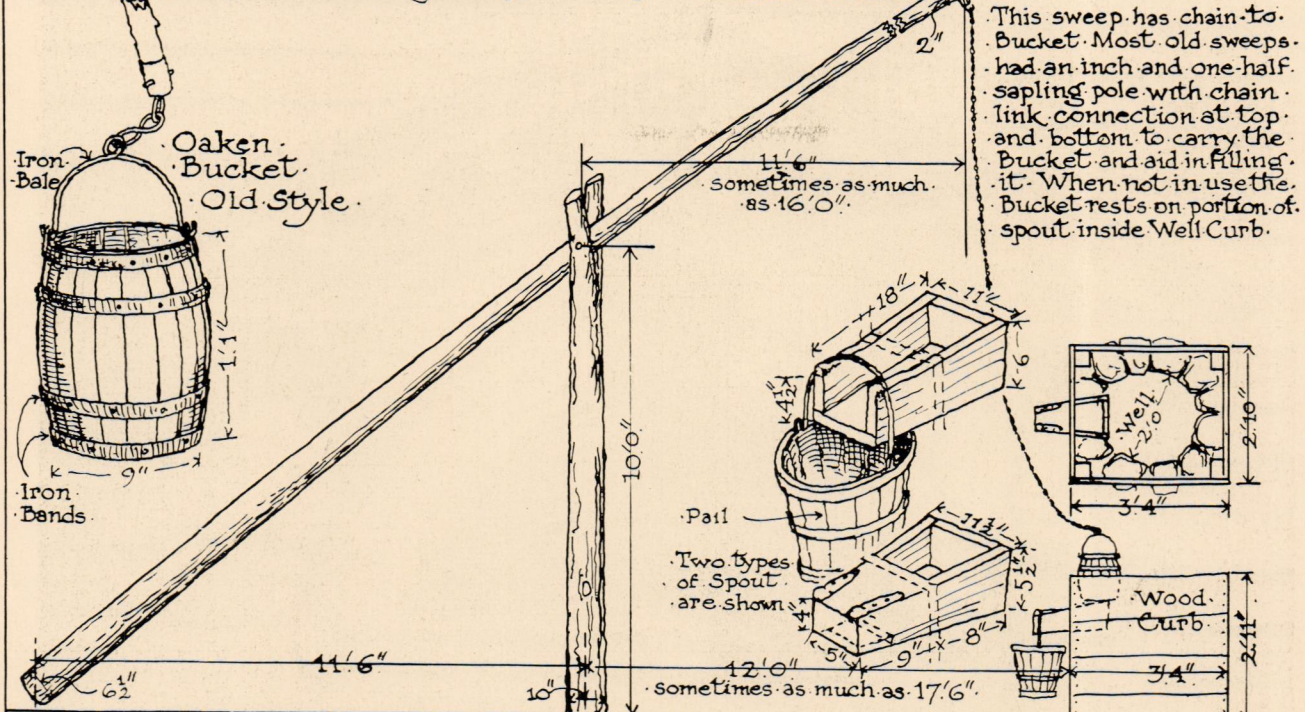
THE JOSEPH MOWRY FARMHOUSE—FROM 1701—SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND



Front Door (See Measured Drawing Page 41)
THE JOSEPH MOWRY FARMHOUSE—1701—SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

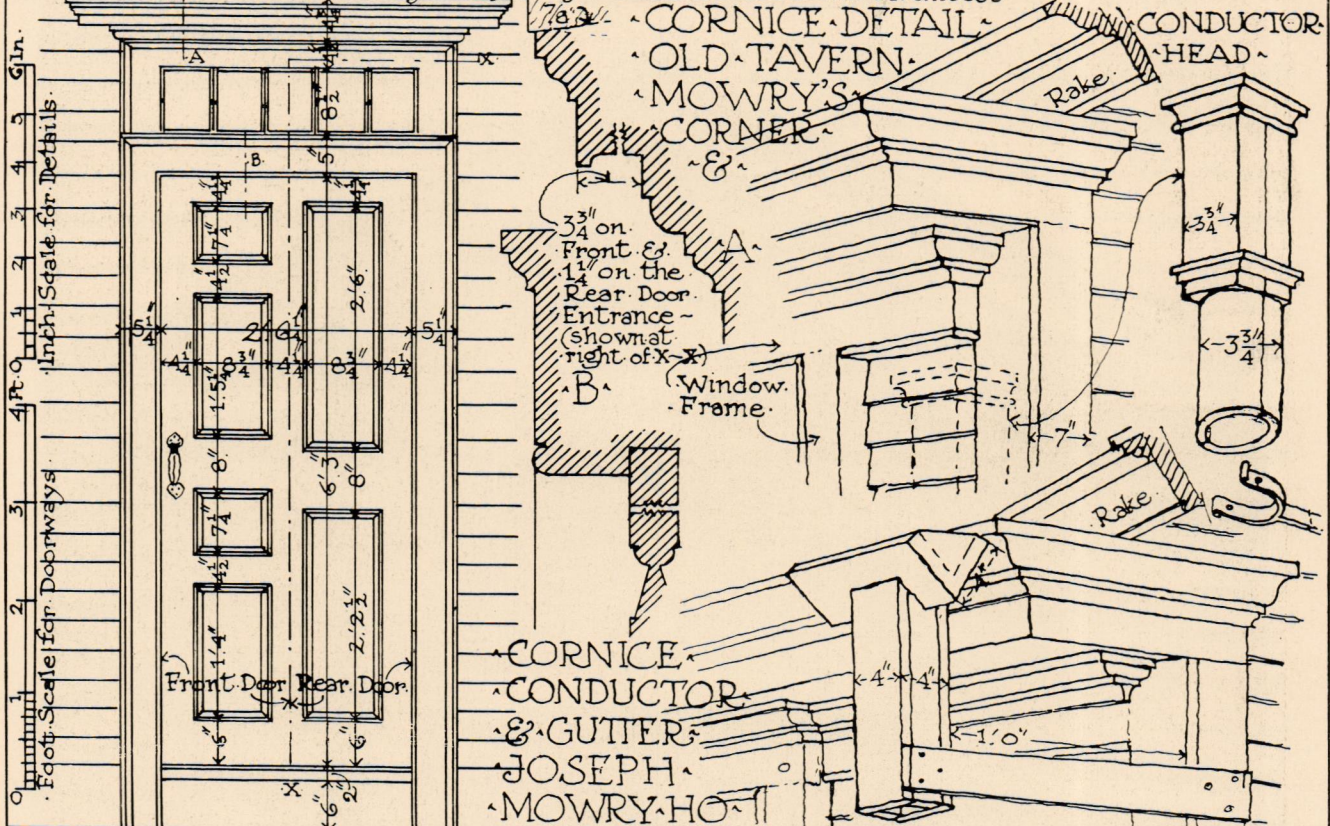
[40]

Measured April 7 & Drawn May 12 1935 Frank Chouteau Brown A.I.A.



WELL SWEEP & HEAD JOSEPH MOWRY FARMHOUSE 1701 SMITHFIELD IN RHODE ISLAND U.S.A.

Measured April 21 & Drawn May 12 1935 by Frank Chouteau Brown Architect



JOSEPH MOWRY HOUSE DOORWAYS & TWO CONDUCTOR HEAD DETAILS SMITHFIELD IN RHODE ISLAND U.S.A.



DOORWAY DETAIL—ANGELL HOUSE NUMBER TWO, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND



DOORWAY DETAIL—STEERE HOMESTEAD, STILLWATER, RHODE ISLAND

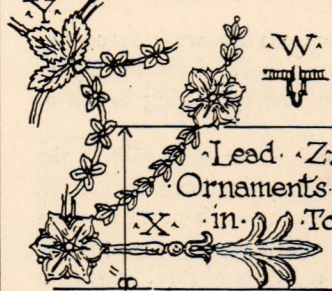
[42]

Measured April 20. & Drawn May 3, 1935. by Frank Chouteau Brown, A. I. A. Boston.

Foot Scale for Elevations.

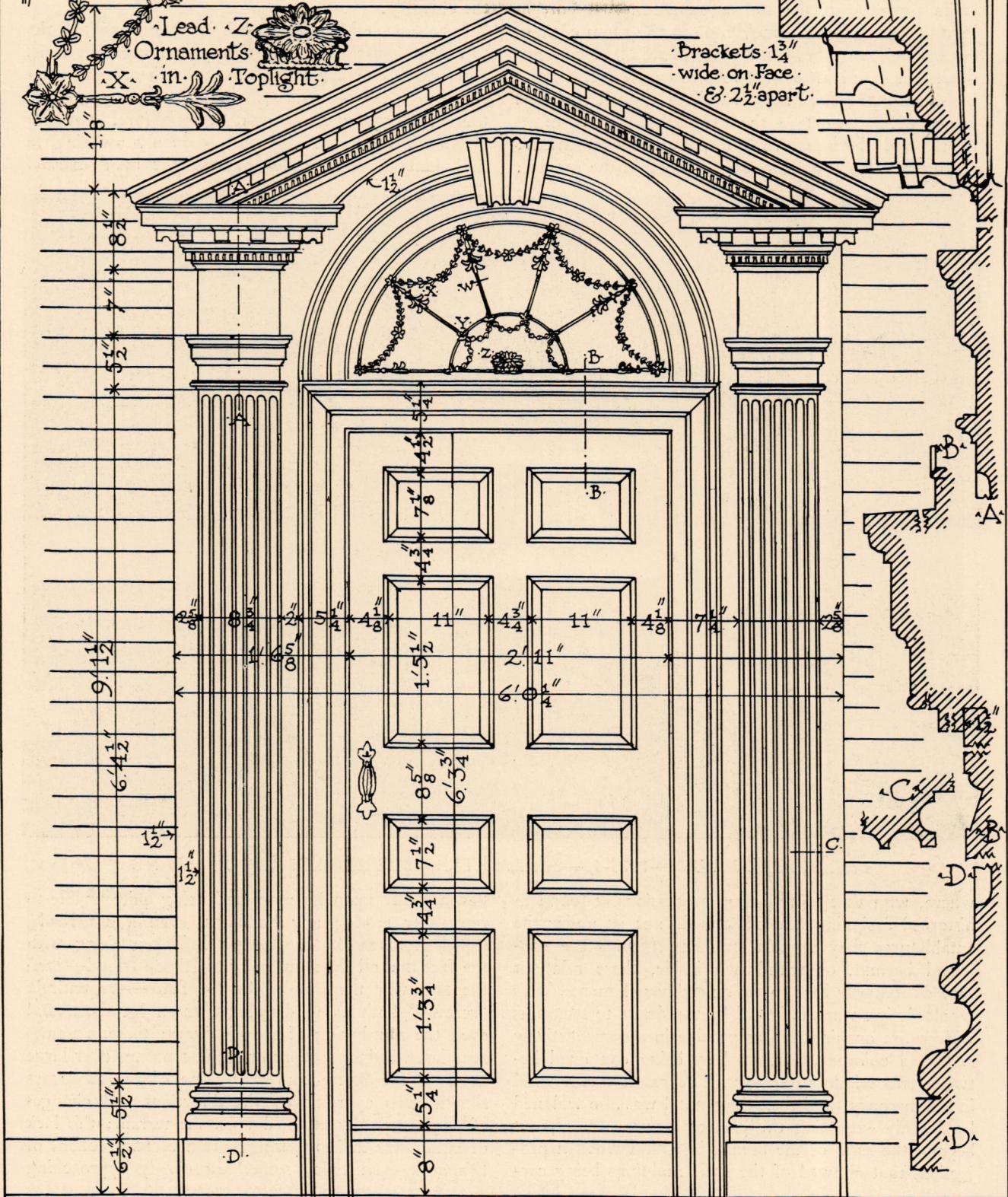
Inch Scale for Details.

Keystone



Lead Z.
Ornaments
X. in. Toplight.

Bracket's $1\frac{3}{4}$ "
wide on Face.
& $2\frac{1}{2}$ " apart.



DETAIL OF DOORWAY STEERE HOUSE 1825-30
STILLWATER SMITHFIELD IN RHODE ISLAND

The interior of the second Angell house has a very delicately detailed stairway, and some very charming wood ornament and molding in the principal downstairs room, with the use of some unusual—or, at least, unconventional—moldings. In the room cornice, for instance, is to be seen a mold made up of continuous guttæ; and an attractive and unusual treatment is shown in the dado cap, as well. The wall cupboard is out of the usual in the arrangement both of its doors, and the molding and pilaster enframement; treatments that are very nearly echoed at the mantel;

ried out and around this short curtain wall, returning at each end, and coming in at the back of this flying false-wall again to the side of the projecting breast of the chimney.

The Joseph Mowry house is in another part of the township, quite near the solitary building that is its post office, and appears to mark its theoretical—and entirely vacant!—center; rather confusing to the tourist, hurrying along the thoroughfare, awaiting arrival at the town and then suddenly awaking to find himself some miles beyond the spot marked



THE STEERE HOUSE—1825-30—STILLWATER, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

where, with that naiveté that is occasionally found in historical designing, the pilasters do not set under the entablatures they support, molding facures are projected beyond, or withdrawn inside, those relations they customarily bear to their neighbor elements. This whole design was motivated by the desire to secure as wide a fire opening as was possible in a comparatively restricted chimney, narrowed by being contained between two window openings. The result was secured in the masonry; and then the mantel was also widened by frankly extending the pilaster face treatment, out beyond the sides of the breast, in a thin wooden projection, that allowed of the shelf moldings being car-

"Smithfield" upon his map, and being quite unable to remember passing any buildings, even a crossroads, sufficient to mark the "center"! Taken along with the fact that all the maps of rural Rhode Island—even the Highway maps issued by the State—are entirely "screwed" both as to directions, town locations, and even the numbering of the highways; that no names are placed at intersections or street crossings over large areas of the State; and that none of the roadways shown even approximate the directions and changes of angles actually attained upon the terrain; this lack of landmarks makes touring within certain sections of this area even today something closely approaching

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Begun at End of Eighteenth Century, "Modernized" about 1825
 THE TAVERN, MOWRY'S CORNER, NEAR SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

[45]

all the uncertainties and thrills of real adventure!

But to return and try and find the Mowry house again! It was first glimpsed flung far out upon a jutting hillside, with no apparent means of approach. By sharp eyesight, good luck and the exercise of considerable acumen, deduction, and prestidigitation, a practicable means was finally discovered, and the quite rural and charmingly informal arrangement shown in the picture was disclosed. The wellsweep had been

pears from the sketch of the cornice, where its relation to the window frames is also indicated, and particularly the beautiful wooden conductor, worked from two pieces of stock, and round below the head, is drawn out, as well as the type of iron holder—restored from a fragment found on the ground below. A portion of the “V” shaped gutter, similar to that on the Joseph Mowry House shown below it, was also still lying upon the ground. As indicated, it was



THE LATHAM COTTAGE—ABOUT 1720—NEAR MOWRY'S CORNER, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

partly modernized and rebuilt, but the older part of the house, that nearest the road, dated from 1701, with one of the simplest and best proportioned doorways (the one at the rear containing an old four-panel door—rather rarely encountered; and well worth studying for contrast with the modern “stock” travesties of the same type of design!).

Not far above Stillwater, where the Steere House stands on the hilltop above the old millsite and dam, that partly floods the valley below, is the old cross-roads known as “Mowry's Corner.” Here still stands the old Tavern that gave the crossing its name. This older house has considerable charm of detail, as ap-

made from old boards, $\frac{3}{4}$ ” thick, and 4” wide.

Not far away from the “Corner” is the old Latham cottage, as delightful a composition of Gambrel roof slopes as may be found in the old “Plantations.”

Upon a rolling open hillside, not far above the Joseph Mowry farmhouse stands the Old Appleby house, now much modernized to serve its summer purpose of housing a large family. The porch at the corner—from which the best view and the coolest breeze may be found!—was formerly the old “kitchen ell,” and at the rear a new wing has been built; but the old door is still found in its unusual location, as part of the composition of the end gable.

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THE OLD APPLEBY HOUSE, SMITHFIELD, RHODE ISLAND

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Porch and Doorway

THE WALTER ALLEN HOUSE, UNION VILLAGE, RHODE ISLAND

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